

CLAIMS

1. A method of enabling a computer network user to print a task on a printer connected to the network via an associated printer server, the method comprising

5 maintaining a database of print credit tokens on the printer server or another server connected to the network;

10 the printer server querying the credit token database and determining, in advance of printing the task, whether the credit token database holds sufficient tokens to enable the task to be printed and, if it does, sending the task to the printer and decrementing the print credit token number held in the credit token database;

15 maintaining, on a remote server, a database of printer servers and associated printers;

connecting the credit token database to the printer server database automatically or at the instigation of a user on the network;

verifying the identity of the printer server at the printer server database; and

downloading print credit tokens to the credit token database to update the

20 database of print credit tokens after verification of the identity of the printer server.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the credit token database and the printer server database are a single database.

3. A method according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the credit token database is located on a server remote from the printer server.

4. A method according to claim 3, wherein the remote server is separate from the server hosting the printer server database.

5. A method according to claim 1, wherein each token represents an amount of printed material.

6. A method according to claim 5, wherein each token represents a pixel of printing.

7. A method according to claim 5, wherein each token represents an amount of printing ink.

8. A method according to claim 5, wherein each token represents an amount of paper.

9. A method of maintaining a database of print credit tokens on a server attached to a computer network to enable users to print tasks on a printer connected to a printer server on the network, the method comprising

5 decrementing the print credit token number held in the credit token database each time a task is printed on the printer;

 maintaining, on a remote server, a database of printer servers and associated printers; and

 connecting the credit token database to the printer server database automatically or at the instigation of a user on the network;

10 verifying the identity of the printer server at the printer server database; and

 downloading print credit tokens to the credit token database to update the database of print credit tokens after verification of the identity of the printer server.

10. A method according to claim 1 or claim 9, wherein

5 the printer server database queries the printer server for an identity string and compares this string against a database of authorised identities; and

 if the identity is found within the database then the printer server database enables the credit token database to buy digital print credit tokens, receive information on revised pricing plans or order additional consumables.

11. A method according to claim 9 or claim 10, wherein the purchase of print credit tokens is achieved by authorising payment from an account associated with the respective printer.

12. A method according to claim 10, wherein purchase of print credit tokens is achieved by authorising payment via credit card payment.

13. A method according to claim 10, wherein purchase of print credit tokens is achieved by authorising payment via account billing.

14. A method according to claim 1 or claim 9, where verification of the identity of the printer server is achieved by use of a hardware key, or dongle attached to the printer server.

15. A method according to claim 1 or claim 9, wherein the computer network is any one of a local area network, intranet, wide area network, and the Internet.

16. A method according to claim 1 or claim 9, further comprising restoring a credit token to the credit token database if the print fails to complete.

17. A method in accordance with claim 1 or claim 9, further comprising providing a block token issuer; and authorising blocks of credits to the printer server database for enabling print credit tokens to be supplied to the credit token database.